

Philadelphia to San Francisco, in mint condition

By Roger Boye

A MAN strolled into a small Chicago coin shop two weeks ago.

"A friend says this 1894 silver dollar is worth \$100," he told the proprietor.

The proprietor shook his head and explained that the coin would sell for \$10, not \$100. True, an 1894 dollar without a mint mark [indicating the dollar was made in Philadelphia] sells for \$100 in extremely fine condition, the proprietor said.

Unfortunately, the custom-

er failed to check the reverse of his coin for a mint mark. The small "O" on the reverse indicated it was minted in New Orleans. About 1.6 million more silver dollars were made in New Orleans in 1894 than were made in Philadelphia. [Only 111,000 silver dollars were made in Philadelphia that year.] Thus, the value of the New Orleans-minted 1894 dollar is much less than the 1894 Philadelphia-minted dollar.

To identify a coin, checking the mint mark is just as important as checking the

date. Mint marks are found on the obverse [heads side] of some United States coins and on the reverse [tails side] of other coins.

U. S. coins have been made in seven cities since Congress established coinage standards in April, 1792. The U. S. Mint in Philadelphia has operated continuously since it first made cents and half-cents in 1793.

Coins minted in Philadelphia do not carry a mint mark [except nickels made from 1942 to 1945 which carry a "P" on the reverse]. Collectors will often refer to

a coin minted in Philadelphia as "plain" [a coin without a mint mark].

Three other U. S. mints were opened in 1838—in Charlotte, N. C.; Dahlonega, Ga.; and New Orleans. The Charlotte and Dahlonega mints were located close to early gold mining regions of the Appalachian Mountains and minted gold coins only in denominations from \$1 to \$5. Both were closed in 1861 when the Confederate government seized the buildings, and neither was reopened after the Civil War as a mint.

Gold coins made from 1838 to 1861 in Charlotte carry a "C" mint mark, and gold coins made in Dahlonega those same years carry a "D" mint mark.

A much larger mint was also opened in 1838 in New Orleans which produced both gold and silver coins. It was the only Southern mint reopened after the Civil War and produced coins until 1909. Coins minted in New Orleans carry an "O" mint mark.

The San Francisco Mint—one of three operating today—opened in 1854 to supply

the fast-growing West with coins. Coins made in San Francisco are identified by a "S" mint mark.

Coins made there from 1906 to 1967 inclusive do not carry mint marks.

Some of the scarcest U. S. coins were minted in Carson City, Nev., from 1870 to 1893. Located near the Comstock Lode, the mint produced few coins in certain years and soon outlived its usefulness.

The third mint operating today was opened in Denver in 1906. Coins made in Denver carry a "D" mint mark.